DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 378 601 CS 508 771

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TITLE Preserving the Integrity of the Beginning Communication Course: An Examination of Current Practices.
PUB DATE Nov 94
NOTE 27p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (80th, New Orleans, LA, November 19-22, 1994).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College Administration; Communication Skills; Educational Practices; Higher Education; *Introductory Courses; *Speech Communication; Teaching Assistants; Textbooks; Undergraduate Students
IDENTIFIERS *Educational Issues; Faculty Attitudes; *Speech Communication Education

ABSTRACT

It could be argued that the basic communication course is the center of the speech communication discipline. And yet there is little consensus as to the approach to teaching speech skills, what skills to teach, or whether the teaching of skills is even effective. Four areas for discussion must be considered if communication scholars are to maintain the integrity of the basic course. First, too many basic courses are taught by graduate teaching assistants. This is unfair to the students because they receive in the vast majority of cases an inferior education; and it is unfair to the graduate assistants because they are unprepared for a task of this dimension. Second, it is time that administrators emphasize and reward teaching. Third, communication scholars themselves are one of the biggest obstacles to innovation in the basic course. They resist innovation because it means commitment of additional resources and, furthermore, they are simply unfamiliar with research on communications pedagogy. Fourth, communication scholars have not done a good job of educating the university community about what they do in the basic course; it is not just about teaching public speaking. Fifth, textbooks available for the basic course are a disappointment; for the most part, scholars continue to teach in the tradition Aristotle outlined 2000 years ago. (TB)

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ED 378 601

PRESERVING THE INTEGRITY OF THE BEGINNING COMMUNICATION COURSE: AN EXAMINATION OF CURRENT PRACTICES

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Presented during the Speech Communication Association Annual Convention, New Orleans, LA, November 1994.

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PRESERVING THE INTEGRITY OF THE BEGINNING COMMUNICATION COURSE: AN EXAMINATION OF CURRENT PRACTICES

One could argue that the basic course is the center of our discipline. Those of us involved in teaching and directing the basic course certainly feel this is true. We teach the most students and are primarily responsible for teaching these students oral communication skills. As higher education in general has been the focal point of attacks regarding its value while at the same time communication skills have taken center stage for employers, we have done little to check the integrity of what we teach or how we teach it. In my opinion, we have avoided, deliberately or unconsciously, the important discussion regarding what we do. John Daly at the Speech Communication Association Summer Conference on Assessment stated we have little research to suggest that any way we teach communication skills is defensible (1994). It doesn't matter if it is the hybrid basic course, the public speaking basic course, the interpersonal communication basic course, or the communication theory basic course; there is little evidence to suggest that any one approach is better at teaching communication skills to students, much less which method of teaching any one approach is better than any other. As a result we cannot agree on an approach to teaching skills, what skills to teach, or that students have more skills when they leave the course than when they entered. Each of us faces assessment demands by our accrediting agencies. However, assessment issues do not necessarily solve this problem; in fact it may make it worse. This is clear when communication scholars get together to talk about assessment or communication competence. The debate becomes heated and disagreement abounds. I am taking a

cynical view of what we do. My intent is to spur these important discussions.

Communication educators cannot agree on what to assess and what competencies are to be emphasized. In spite of John Daly's plea, for the sake of the communication discipline, that we agree on what they are, I doubt there is, or will be, agreement. Current practices will continue to vary institution-by-institution, course-by-course. The only real change in approach occurs when the director of the basic course changes. Basic courses will continue to vary institution-by-institution; with some relying on the hybrid course, others emphasizing public speaking, and still others using the interpersonal communication course as their "basic" course. Finally, instructional practices will continue to vary institution-by-institution, course-by-course, section-by-section.

With this in mind, what can be done to insure that whatever communication course students take and whatever competencies are ultimately assessed, that the integrity of what we do in the basic course can be maintained (assuming it has integrity now on your campus)? I will focus on several areas in this paper. These areas are:

- instructors in the basic course (graduate assistants and part-time faculty)
- university administrators (departmental, college, and university)
- our colleagues in communication
- other faculty across campus
- publishers, authors, and reviewers

Basic course directors and department administrators will reject that any of this applies to them -- **it applies to all of us**. It applies to the four-year undergraduate college, the private school, the community college, and it applies to programs with masters and/or doctoral programs. No one is exempt. We are all responsible for maintaining the integrity of the basic communication course. Few faculty or administrators want to question the way we do things in the basic communication courses. This centers on the fact that if no one is complaining about the basic course, the "cash cow" for departments, then nothing could be going wrong. If the course director does not hear complaints, then the instructors must be doing a "good" job. If the department administrator does not hear student complaints, then the instructors and course director must be doing a "good" job. The same is true all the way up the organizational structure at colleges and universities.

Do we need a revolution in the way we teach and operate our basic communication courses? Maybe. For most basic communication courses and programs, what is probably needed is on some serious self-reflection and some adjustment. This paper discusses the five areas (listed above) where some self-reflection and adjustments might be needed.

Areas of Legitimate Concern

All five areas are important. They are integral to the success of failure of the basic communication course. Yet none are as important as who teaches the students in

the course.

Instructors in the Basic Course

Since helping students to become better communicators is the goal of the basic course, the single-most important area related to maintaining the integrity of the basic communication course on each campus is the individual instructor. The instructor has the responsibility of teaching the students, working with them to improve their communication skills, and attesting that the students passed the course with some measure of skill. Each of these activities is an important task for the instructor. Yet, many colleges and universities turn over these tasks to the least qualified, inexperienced people in the department -- the graduate teaching assistant (GTA). There are too many sections of the basic communication course to staff, too many students to teach, and too few resources to hire additional full time faculty. Anderson writes, "The clever solution that professors have come up with for the teaching albatross that grew around their necks in the 1960s and 1970s is the teaching assistant" (50). University administrators and faculty will be and are quick to defend this system. The common defense offered by faculty and administrators is that GTAs receive valuable teaching experience before they begin their careers upon graduation as faculty -- a kind of apprenticeship program. Anderson concludes, "The driving force behind every system or apprenticeship is simple. It is not the benevolent idea of training young men and women to help them succeed in the world. There were no altruists in the guilds. The main purpose of having apprentices is to have them do as much of your menial, boring, repetitive work as

possible, for as long as possible" (69). This is certainly a common view in communication departments across the country.

The fact is most of us received our start as a GTA in a basic communication course. Each of us was probably ill-prepared to teach, yet we were thrust into the classroom and expected to do a good job. Martin Anderson writes, "Student teachers are used today because the universities have discovered they can get away with it, and because student 'professors' are cheaper than real professors" (66). It is true, the cost of hiring GTAs saves departments, colleges, and universities a great deal of money. The economic forces that are wed to this practice are strong, they are real, and they are not likely to go away.

Who is cheated in this process? Undergraduate students are cheated because they receive, in the vast majority of cases an inferior education. The GTA is cheated because she or he faces an almost impossible task and stumble through the course once or several times to get their bearings -- to get comfortable with the challenges of their job. Taxpayers and people who pay tuition are cheated because the most qualified instructors are not teaching. The communication discipline also loses because of the poor instruction going on in most of these courses. One of the primary reasons why students want to continue studying communication at all is their contact in the beginning course (they like the instructor, they learn something, they have a positive experience in the basic course). Think of how many more students might consider studying communication if they had better experiences with better-qualified instructors in the basic communication course.

In criticizing the practice of relying on GTAs to deliver an instructional program, Anderson, in his book Impostors in the Temple, writes,

> "The seamy practice of allowing, and sometimes coercing, students to teach students, is one of the most significant forms of academic corruption, and one of the easiest to correct. Prohibit all student teaching. Simply adopt a policy that says all classes will be taught by professors, all discussion sections will be led by professors, all examinations will be made up by professors, all examinations will be graded by professors, and all counseling of students will be done by professors" (62).

Although banning all GTAs from the classroom is probably an unrealistic action, there is a huge grain of truth to Anderson's criticism of the practice. Anderson continues his critique:

> "Students are not qualified to teach. They do not possess enough knowledge. They do not have enough judgment and maturity. They rarely know how to teach. They have powerful conflicts of interest, for in many cases they must teach and grade some of their friends, or even the young men and women they date. To pretend that students are qualified to lecture other students a scant few years behind them, to grade them and judge them, and to counsel them is to mock the essence of higher education. **Children teaching children is unconscionable**" (64-65).

The economics of this solution appears impractical -- especially to the department or university administration. Administrators rationalize the practice of relying on GTAs by putting someone "in charge" of the GTAs -- the basic course director. The director's job is to work with the GTAs and prepare them for their teaching assignments. The director might conduct a training session at the beginning of the school year for the GTAs. The director might give a weekly mass lecture to all students in the basic course; the director might even occasionally take one of the discussion sections to show how "involved" they are with the basic communication course. In return, basic course directors receive a reduction in their teaching load. Anderson continues his assault on the practice of employing GTAs and the practice of assigning a senior-level faculty member to "supervise" them. He writes, "The size of the class, and how valuable the experience is for the young instructor, and whether or not a senior professor has oversight responsibility say nothing of the quality of the teaching experience -- the lecturing, the dialogue, the examinations, the judging, the counseling" (65).

Kenneth Eble, professor of English at the University of Utah, concludes, "the TA system is indefensible, like much in academia, and I think it will be not so much defended as kept in place . . . [one of the subclasses] to do our dirty work" (Anderson, 53). Any attempt to stop the system of using cheap labor (GTAs and part-time faculty) will meet with strong resistance. Nyquist, et al. conclude, "Since most institutions cannot cover basic courses without using TA assistance, this pattern is likely to continue" (xii). So we have turned our focus and dedicated some resources to preparing these young GTAs and part-time faculty to be "teachers." We have instituted training programs to

help our GTAs and part-time faculty.

Training GTAs and Part-Time Faculty to Teach. Although we recognize the importance of training our GTAs to work in the basic communication course, we cannot train them enough. The training we need to give GTAs and part-time faculty comes in two primary forms: knowledge and teaching skill. Can course directors and senior faculty train GTAs enough early in their graduate studies and part-time faculty to have sufficient knowledge of the subject matter to make them qualified teachers? If the answer is "no", they why do we turn them loose in the classroom with insufficient knowledge of communication? If the answer is "yes", then why do we need graduate programs if we can give them sufficient knowledge in a training program of short duration? So what happens is GTAs and part-time faculty might be a chapter ahead of the class in the textbook with as many questions about the content of the text as the undergraduate students in the course. The fact is in most cases, GTAs and part-time faculty do not possess discipline literacy -- either an historic appreciation or current understand. As a result they are ill-prepared to teach the course content. Nyquist, et al. point out that "Most institutions find it difficult to point to teaching assistantship experiences which represent systematic, developmental, discipline-oriented teacher training programs or apprenticeships" (xi).

Even if we recognize the probabilities that GTAs and part-time faculty do not have sufficient knowledge to be effective classroom teachers, the greater problem is that the same GTAs and part-time faculty who lack discipline knowledge, also lack teaching skills. The experts in teaching are in colleges of education, and we seldom rely on them

to train our GTAs and part-time faculty to be good teachers. Again, there is insufficient time to prepare them to be good teachers before they have to walk into the basic course classroom and begin teaching. This is the real sham of the training programs: we do not **and** we cannot train GTAs or part-time faculty to become good teachers before they have to walk into the classroom and begin teaching. Yet there are many basic course directors and university administrators who assert we train our GTAs and part-time faculty in a week or in a day or through a term-long course to be good teachers. This is an excellent rationalization for placing ill-prepared, poorly qualified young women and men into the classroom to sink or swim.

Nyquist, et al. sum up the problems facing those responsible for instruction in the basic communication course:

> "The lack of systematic preparation for teaching is the result of many forces: the Academy's dependence upon, preference for, responsibility for research activities; limited research assistant-ships available for graduate student support which force graduate students who do not intend to teach into temporary teaching positions; the attractive economics of staffing undergraduate courses with teaching assistants, incentive systems built into most institutions which clearly reward research over teaching; a strong belief that if scholars know their disciplines they can automatically teach them; limited definitions of scholarship and lack of research on effective TA training" (xii).

The interesting thing is that much of this research has nothing to do with the basic course. However, these same faculty like to use students in the basic course as subjects for their research. Communication journals are replete with studies using basic communication course students as subjects.

Martin Anderson offers us a solution to this problem by recommending:

> "The first thing professors must do is profess, to teach special knowledge. This is primarily what they are paid to do: to lecture students, to discuss and argue with them, to grade and judge them, to counsel and advise them. Everything else professors do -- committee work, community service, scholarly research -- is extra, above and beyond the basic requirements of their craft" (47).

Others have stated faculty need to return to their primary function -- teaching. In 1990, then President of Stanford University noted: "We need to talk about teaching more, respect and reward those who do it well, and make it first among our labors. It should be our labor of love, and the personal responsibility of each one of us" (Anderson, 46). As educators interested in what we do in the basic course, we should reexamine our reliance or over-reliance on GTAs and/or part-time faculty in the basic course. To reduce the dependency on these poorly qualified instructors, full service, senior faculty need to teach more sections of the basic course. Is this a realistic approach? Probably not; but if we don't reexamine the practice of students teaching students, how can we assert our profession as educators or the communication discipline has any integrity at

all?

University Administrators and the Basic Course

Les Cochran, President of Youngstown State University and author of the book Publish or Perish, emphasizes the importance of teaching on every campus. In his book, he asserts: "The level of visibility given to teaching on campus can have an important bearing on the general perceptions of the faculty" (119). It's time administrators emphasize and reward teaching. Emphasizing teaching is more than giving it lip service. Emphasis means providing resources to departments and course directors to develop teaching strategies and hire and train qualified instructors.

University administrators like large, multi-sectioned courses taught by GTAs and part-time faculty because they "turn a profit" (a large profit) on those courses. Historically, administrators, especially those who are not familiar with communication education, have not been quick to support innovation in the basic communication course. Some of these administrators may have had one communication course in their undergraduate education, thought it worked for them, and thinks it continues to work for today's students. If they take a look at most of the textbooks used in basic communication courses, they will find that the way current textbooks are written is fundamentally the same as it was when they were an undergraduate student. (This issue is a problem in our discipline and will be discussed later in more detail.)

Because communication skills are so important in our society, the basic communication course should stand center-stage. However, we cannot do this unless

there is a commitment from administrators to the basic course program. I am not suggesting that there has been no innovation in basic course instruction; I am declaring that it has been slow and not very wide spread. For example, the University of Nebraska has adopted the PSI approach to instruction in their basic communication course which includes the use of undergraduate students to serve as raters of assignments. Mentioning this program is not to suggest it is **the** model to adopt. I mention it because it is a different approach to basic communication instruction that has **not** been widely adopted. Why? One of the reasons is related to the initial set up costs of developing and implementing such a program. Administrators, because they are administrators, shy away from high cost items. (Another reason is the faculty in communication departments who also resist change. More on this later.) We have to convince administrators that these innovations are not only important, but essential to helping undergraduate students learn communication skills.

Administrators want results -- a demonstration of successful teaching. They expect students who have been through the basic communication course to be competent communicators. As ludicrous as this seems, it is reality on most campuses. These perceptions do more to tarnish the integrity of the basic course than perhaps any other single variable. It is an impossible to teach students to be competent communicators in one term of instruction. Many communication educators point to the fact that students have had twelve full years of instruction in written communication and many remain incompetent at that skill. We have to do a better job of educating our administrators that students cannot possibly become competent oral communicators in one term in a

single communication course. We can teach some communication skills to these students (organization, speech preparation, listening skills, etc.). We cannot teach them to be competent communicators in one quarter or one semester. (Let's forget the fact that we cannot even agree on what communication competence is.) This issue is becoming increasingly more important with the increasing emphasis on assessment and accountability. Communication educators must set realistic goals on what one course in communication can accomplish. If we set unrealistic goals (students achieving communication competence) then the image of our discipline and our integrity as profession will continue to be less than it could be.

Finally, our image as a community of communication scholars and teachers interested in the basic communication course is tarnished with many administrators from the onset. By using the term "basic" in the title of these courses and programs gives administrators the wrong impression about what we do. When many administrators think of "basic" courses they think of remedial courses in math, reading, and English. Our courses are not remedial, but they can be and are perceived to be that way by administrators. Administrators are hesitant to devote a great deal of money to a "basic" (remedial) program when they have, what they believe to be, more important needs for financial and institutional resources. We need to move away from the phrase "basic communication course." Several years ago Raymond Ross suggested we use the phrase "beginning communication course" instead. For the above reasons, I would have to agree with Professor Ross.

Department Colleagues and the Beginning Communication Course

One of the greatest obstacles to innovation in the beginning communication course and enhancing its integrity are our colleagues **in our own departments**. Many of these faculty do not appreciate the beginning communication course. Many of our colleagues do not want to teach the beginning communication course, do not want anything to do with the beginning communication course, and see no value to it. This is not isolated to our discipline, but is evidence of a larger epidemic in higher education. Anderson points out, "An increasing number of professors not only do not like to teach (and avoid it whenever possible) but, even worse, have little regard for the teaching efforts of their colleagues" (46). Communication educators who are not involved in the beginning communication course must gain an appreciation of these courses beyond the obvious advantage of supplying needed enrollment (FTEs) and income to the department. Beginning communication courses subsidize the other things these faculty do -- and they know it.

Innovations in the beginning communication course are typically met with resistance by our own colleagues. This resistance occurs for several reasons. First, it means a commitment of additional resources; resources that are now not available to our colleagues. The amount of financial resources needed might be small -- but so are department budgets (and they are getting smaller). Faculty see the beginning communication course taking a greater percentage of department resources away from them. Second, many communication faculty do not understand the beginning communication course on their own campus. Their view of the course is the same view

they had when they were GTAs and teaching a beginning course or when they were undergraduate students taking a communication course. Third, many of our colleagues are simply not familiar with research on communication pedagogy or, in a worst case scenario, have no idea what is going on in the beginning communication course on their own campus. This ignorance leads them to be resistant to change or improvements in the course.

Each faculty member in departments of communication should have an active role in the beginning communication course. This can range from being a member of a committee to develop goals and objectives for the course to teaching sections of the course each term. Involvement will breed an enhanced appreciation for the beginning communication course. This involvement exposes our colleagues to some of the scholarship (albeit scant) completed on beginning communication instruction.

Other Faculty on Campus and the Beginning Communication Course

On many campuses, faculty have a tainted view of the beginning communication course. A common perception is all we do is teach public speaking in these courses. We have not done a good job in educating the university community on what we do. Faculty across our campuses understand the importance of communication skills for their students. They, too, are familiar with the alumni studies and surveys of managers and chief executive officers which point out the importance of college graduates possessing good communication skills. Intuitively, they understand that graduates from their undergraduate programs ought to be able to communicate effectively. The usual

response to these data is to require students to take an oral communication course. They look to communication departments to provide their students with the communication skills identified by alumni and business leaders -- but they only give us one term to do it. This is the same problem many administrators have when it comes to teaching oral communication (teach students to be competent communicators, but only take one term to accomplish it). In response to these requests, we develop beginning communication courses which enroll hundreds of students. We appreciate the increased enrollment and the added (albeit meager) resources to teach the beginning communication course.

What do our friends from around the campus expect in the beginning course? Many of them think we should teach public speaking skills -- after all, everyone knows that people are afraid of giving public speeches. And what is our response? We teach public speaking skills; whether in a public speaking course or the bastardized, watered-down version included in the hybrid course. [This sounds blasphemous!] There is no evidence to suggest that the public speaking beginning course is the best course for undergraduate students. There is no evidence to suggest that the public speaking course should be the first communication course undergraduate students should take. There is no evidence to suggest that the way we teach public speaking has any effect on undergraduate students' overall communication skills.

To improve our image in the community of scholars we need to do two things. First, we need to conduct research about the basic course. We need to research communication skill development results, approaches to instruction, skill development,

placement, and much more. Communication educators need a body of research to use in constructing arguments about what we do -- whether it be to justify expending monies on new instructional methods or explaining why we do the things we do in the course.

Second, we need to kill the hybrid course. (I have co-authored a book in the hybrid market and have taught the hybrid course, so I am not making this claim frivolously.) What other skill course attempts to cover as much as our hybrid beginning communication course? Do mathematic departments collapse algebra, geometry, and calculus into one course in one term? Do English departments collapse expository writing, poetry, and technical writing into one course in one term? No one would suggest these departments to this; in fact if an English professor suggested their department collapse those three types of writing into one course in one term, they would be burned at the stake for heresy. I think this is exactly what we do in our hybrid course -- commit the biggest heresy possible. We teach a course that devotes approximately one third of the available time to interpersonal communication, one third of the available time to group communication, and one third of the available time to public speaking. Instructors expect students to learn, understand, and perform communication skills in each of these situations. No wonder faculty across campuses look at us and wonder what the heck we are doing.

I am certain that some of you will rise to the defense of the hybrid course. The defense of the hybrid course usually centers on the false assumption that we can teach students interpersonal, group, and public speaking skills in one course. After all, we only have these students for one course so let's teach them everything. Perhaps we need to

do a better job at identifying what we can accomplish in one course -- if that is all the students take. We have no core, no center, to the beginning communication course. Each beginning course director and/or each communication faculty member believe they have the "best" way to teach the course. In facing assessment issues forced upon us by regional accrediting associations, we might be better served if there was some agreement as to what the beginning course can accomplish -- in terms of skills and knowledge development. The Speech Communication Association could serve as the coordinating body for such an effort -- like national associations in mathematics, English, and other disciplines. These efforts would do more to maintain, and even enhance, the integrity of the beginning communication course on each campus in the eyes of the faculty community.

Textbooks and the Beginning Communication Course

One of the biggest disappointments in the beginning communication courses is the textbooks we have to use. John Daly, during the 1994 Summer Speech Communication Conference on Communication Assessment, bemoaned the fact that there is little, if any, research to justify the things we teach and the way we teach communication skills in the beginning courses. This is certainly true. For the most part, the way we teach communication skills was outlined by Aristotle two thousand years ago and reinforced in Monroe and Ehninger's landmark book in the mid-20th century. There are three groups of people to blame for this phenomenon: authors, reviewers, and publishers.

Authors. Textbook authors want their books to be successful -- they seek a return

on the time and energy they have invested in writing their textbook. There is no problem with this goal. An associated goal for the author may be to take a new and innovative approach to the teaching of communication skills in the beginning communication course. Seldom are these efforts rewarded in light of book sales. Every author seeks a profitable niche in the textbook market; a necessity if the book is to remain in print.

The problem arises from the tendency to model books after successful books already in the market. Current textbooks serve as the benchmark for authors. What occurs in this process is we keep reinventing the wheel -- we might add a deeper tread, or studs (those were successful, weren't they), or an improved tread design, or an extended warranty. But the problem is, a tire is still tire. Textbooks in beginning course textbook markets are just that -- textbooks. They all look the same. They have almost identical table of contents. They cover the same material in much the same way. No wonder so many books are not successful in the market.

Authors, because of their drive to model their book after another successful book, fail to rely on much, if any, literature base for their work. As was pointed out earlier, there is little research foundation to what we do. How can the course maintain integrity in higher education if the textbooks appear to be the rambling thoughts of one person (due to the lack of research cited) or a reconfiguration of a book already in the market?

Authors, in their genuine interest to develop a textbook that is something different than those already in the market, add material to their book. They add chapters that cannot possibly be covered in a course -- especially a course in a quarter

system. This might relate to their desire as instructors, knowing that the beginning communication course is likely the only communication course most students take, to expose them, in addition to the communication skill development materials, to everything from rhetorical theory to feminist theory to critical thinking to intercultural communication to group communication to ethics to listening. All of these materials must be covered in a term -- whether on a quarter or semester system.

Authors have a long way to go to helping the image and integrity of the beginning course. As an author, I have tried to include different approaches in a textbook only to have reviewers like the approach but state they would not adopt the book because the material is unfamiliar to them. Worse yet, potential adopters have liked the material but are unwilling to change their instructional style to incorporate different or new materials.

Reviewers. If you want to become familiar with the group of people who have the most impact on the textbooks in the beginning course market -- meet the reviewers. Reviewers do more, single-handedly, to make sure textbooks are similar to old, familiar approaches than anyone else.

I've mentioned the fact that our beginning textbooks lack a research base. Why is that? Let me introduce you to the reviewers. When authors cite research materials, reviewers say it clutters up the book or their students can't possible read results of research that substantiate the pedagogy in the text and their course. If authors cite studies, reviewers find them guilty of writing a book too advanced for the beginning communication student. Reviewers influence publishers who demand authors to take out

all that "damn" research.

A second problem is the way reviewers are selected. They are selected not because of their insight into what is going on in the beginning course, but because they are directors of large programs that might be a potential adopter for the publishers. If anyone ever wants to do a rhetorical study on dysfunctional communication, they should study the body of manuscript reviews turned in to publishers. It has seldom failed that reviewers write comments that demonstrate their lack of understanding of instructional trends and research on beginning course pedagogy. Reviewers complain that they are not paid enough to do a review of a textbook manuscript -- in my mind, they get paid too much in most cases. [I have been a reviewer for a dozen or so publishing companies. I too complain about the pittance I am paid to offer constructive criticism of a textbook proposal.] Being a reviewer is an important task. Reviewers can dictate the future direction of the textbooks available for the beginning communication course.

Publishers. Editorial staffs of publishing companies follow a golden rule when preparing a textbook: **The book must be 80% old and 20% new**. And they cheat on the 20% new because they are more comfortable with 10-15% new material. Reviewers can have a tremendous impact on changing or reinforcing this practice. It is easy to understand their position when beginning course directors adopt books because they are familiar with the textbook we believe to represent our approached to communication instruction.

To compensate for this lack of innovation, publishers offer users of their textbooks a whole series of ancillary materials -- two hundred page instructor's manuals,

computerized test banks, overhead transparencies, video tapes, audio tapes, computer outlining programs, and more. All of these materials move the focus of an adoption decision away from the content of the book to focus on the "extras". Sure computerized test banks make it easier for instructors to construct an examination. Sure if overhead transparencies are provided it is easier than having to create our own. The focus of communication educators must be the content of the textbook. To hide the lack of innovation in the books, publishers offer basic course directors all the "extras." How do we maintain integrity with the focus of selecting textbooks is on style over substance?

When faculty are asked why they selected a book for the beginning communication course, the frequent response is "It was similar to the book we were using," or "The text bank was easier to use," or "The students will like the four-color design of the book," or "The book had a great instructor's manual," or "The video tapes are well done and can be used." Seldom do we hear faculty report (if they are being honest) they selected the book because it covered the teaching of communication skills in an innovative way. [I'm not saying our discipline is unlike many others. I'm questioning the entire practice of "buying" adoptions with everything but the content of the book.]

Conclusion

This paper has approached the integrity of the beginning communication course from a variety of perspectives. These included the instructors, administrators,

department faculty, the faculty on a particular campus, authors, reviewers, and publishers. Each group alone could be the focus of a paper related to the integrity of the beginning communication course.

To conclude, here are some solutions to the problems presented:

- Train GTAs and part-time faculty how to teach. This should happen before we ask them to enter the classroom.
- Test the knowledge base of GTAs and part-time faculty to be sure they know the material we want them to teach. This should happen before we ask them to enter the classroom.
- Have all department faculty teach the beginning course.
- Educate administrators on what is happening in the beginning communication course.
- Demand monies to support instruction and instructional development in the beginning communication course.
- Conduct and present research on pedagogy in the beginning communication course. Demonstrate that pedagogical approaches are sound ways of teaching communication skills.
- Never claim that students are competent communicators when they exit the beginning communication course. Avoid this temptation even in this age of demands for assessment and accountability.

- Educate other faculty on your campus to what goes on in the beginning communication course. Form advisory groups with these faculty members for the beginning communication course.
- Kill the hybrid communication course.

- Exert pressure on publishers to print new material related to the beginning communication course.
- Ask to review beginning communication textbooks. Avoid the trap or relying on something that is too familiar or too similar to the way you do things in your beginning course. Look for and reward new ideas.
- Pressure our professional organizations to develop guidelines related to the beginning course. Develop an agreed-upon list on what can be covered in one communication course in a single term. Identify seminal knowledge and essential skills. Let's focus on these and leave the rest of the "stuff" to other courses in our department and subsequent terms.

Without some drastic movement to enhance the integrity of our beginning courses in communication, we will be lucky to hold our own. Communication is a mature discipline; mature enough to discuss issues and conduct research into the ways we teach

and the knowledge and skills we want our students to have after completing the beginning communication course. This paper is only a beginning. Hopefully, the ideas in this paper will spark additional interest and programs to protect our integrity -- let's become leaders in reforming what we do. If we don't talk about or study what we do in the beginning communication course, we will continue to repeat the same things we do now -- good and/or bad.

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